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H PLEASE PASS TO REPRESENTATIVE ACKERMAN

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SUBJECT: CODEL ACKERMAN'S MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER OLMERT

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR RICHARD H. JONES, REASON 1.4 (B) (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. REPRESENTATIVE GARY ACKERMAN (D, NEW YORK), CHAIRMAN OF MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE, ACCOMPANIED BY THE AMBASSADOR, CALLED ON PRIME MINISTER EHUD OLMERT APRIL 11. THEY DISCUSSED OLMERT'S APPROACH TO HIS UPCOMING MEETING WITH PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT ABBAS, THE THREAT FROM IRAN, AND THEIR DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON IRAQ. REGARDING THE MEETING WITH ABBAS, OLMERT SAID HE WOULD BE READY TO DISCUSS MOVEMENT AND ACCESS AND SECURITY ISSUES, BUT NOT JERUSALEM, BORDERS OR REFUGEES. ACKERMAN NOTED THAT ABBAS NEEDS HELP, AND ASKED OLMERT TO THINK ABOUT HOW TO BOLSTER HIS POSITION. OLMERT URGED ACKERMAN TO CANCEL HIS APPOINTMENT THE NEXT DAY WITH NUG FOREIGN MINISTER ABU AMAR, ARGUING THAT THE MEETING WOULD GIVE THE NUG FORMAL RECOGNITION. ON IRAN AND IRAQ, ACKERMAN EXPRESSED HIS VIEW THAT THE U.S. ROLE IN IRAQ WAS UNDERCUTTING OUR ABILITY TO CONFRONT IRAN. OLMERT SAID THE U.S. SHOULD MOBILIZE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AGAINST IRAN, BUT ALSO INSISTED THAT A PREMATURE WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ WOULD STRENGTHEN IRAN AND ISLAMIC RADICALS, WHILE UNDERMINING MODERATE ARAB STATES. AT THE END OF THE MEETING, ACKERMAN ASKED OLMERT TO BRING MORE ETHIOPIAN JEWS TO ISRAEL AND SUGGESTED THE GOI FIND WAYS TO SUPPORT PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) HOUSE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN GARY ACKERMAN, ACCOMPANIED BY THE AMBASSADOR, SUBCOMMITTEE STAFF DIRECTOR DAVID ADAMS, STAFF MEMBER HOWARD DIAMOND, AND POL COUNS CALLED ON PM EHUD OLMERT APRIL 11. OLMERT WAS FLANKED BY OFFICE DIRECTOR YORAM TURBOWICZ, FOREIGN POLICY ADVISER SHALOM TOURGEMAN, AND MFA NORTH AMERICAS DEPARTMENT CONGRESSIONAL LIAISON EYAL SELA. OLMERT TOLD ACKERMAN THAT HE HAD PHONED HOUSE SPEAKER NANCY PELOSI TO THANK HER FOR HER EFFORTS WITH THE SYRIANS ON BEHALF OF THE MISSING ISRAELI SOLDIERS.

APPROACH TO ABBAS

¶3. (C) OLMERT SAID HE PLANNED TO MEET ABBAS APRIL 15 AS PART OF THEIR MUTUAL COMMITMENT TO SECRETARY RICE TO CONDUCT BI-WEEKLY MEETINGS. THERE WAS A "LOT TO TALK ABOUT," FOR EXAMPLE HOW TO BALANCE ISRAEL'S REMOVAL OF ROADBLOCKS AND OPENING OF CROSSINGS WITH PALESTINIAN ACTION TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TRUCK BOMBS GETTING THROUGH. OLMERT SAID HE HOPED TO WORK WITH ABBAS TO SET BENCHMARKS. HE ADDED THAT ISRAEL WAS WILLING TO COOPERATE IN THE DELIVERY OF WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT TO PALESTINIAN SECURITY FORCES LOYAL TO ABBAS IN GAZA.

¶4. (C) ELABORATING ON ISSUES HE WANTED TO RAISE WITH ABBAS, OLMERT STRESSED THAT HE WOULD NOT DISCUSS JERUSALEM, BORDERS OR REFUGEES. OLMERT COMMENTED THAT IF THEY SOMEHOW REACHED

AGREEMENT ON REFUGEES, EITHER HE OR ABBAS WOULD BE DESTROYED POLITICALLY. IF ABBAS CANNOT DELIVER SHALIT, HOW CAN HE POSSIBLY DELIVER ON FINAL STATUS ISSUES? NONETHELESS, THEY SHOULD START TALKING AND SEE WHERE THEIR TALKS REACHED IN A FEW MONTHS. THE INSTITUTIONS OF A PALESTINIAN STATE, ITS SECURITY FORCES, LAWS, AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE WERE ALL PART OF A POLITICAL HORIZON. OLMERT SAID HE AGREED WITH SECRETARY RICE ON THE NEED TO MOVE FORWARD AND CLAIMED THAT PROGRESS COULD BE REGISTERED AFTER A FEW MONTHS OF BI-WEEKLY TALKS. HE ADDED THAT MUBARAK WAS SKEPTICAL BECAUSE OF THE ARAB EXPECTATION OF IMMEDIATE RESULTS, WHILE HE THOUGHT THE PROCESS WOULD NOT TAKE YEARS, IT WOULD TAKE "MORE THAN DAYS."

15. (C) ACKERMAN COMMENTED THAT ABBAS WAS A VERY WEAK PARTNER, BUT HE WAS WILLING TO BE A PARTNER. HE SAID HE DID NOT KNOW IF ABBAS COULD "DELIVER THE MORNING PAPER, MUCH LESS SHALIT." ACKERMAN DOUBTED THAT ABBAS KNEW HOW TO WIN AN ELECTION OR RUN A CAMPAIGN. ABBAS WAS IN A ZERO-SUM GAME WITH HAMAS, AND COULD NOT WIN ON HIS OWN. HIZBALLAH AND HAMAS UNDERSTOOD THE NEED TO "BECOME SANTA CLAUS" BY DISTRIBUTING PATRONAGE. EVEN IF A DEAL WAS REACHED FOR SHALIT, ABBAS WOULD NOT GET THE CREDIT. ACKERMAN ASKED HOW OLMERT PLANNED TO BOLSTER ABBAS.

16. (C) OLMERT RESPONDED THAT HE COULD NOT STRENGTHEN SOMEONE WHO DID NOT WANT TO BE STRENGTHENED. ISRAEL HAD HAD PLANS BUT IT HAD COME TO NOTHING DUE TO THE NUG. OLMERT COMPLAINED THAT HIS ADVISERS HAD TALKED TO MOHAMMED DAHLAN THREE WEEKS AGO ABOUT A SECURITY PLAN, BUT DAHLAN HAD DONE NOTHING. NONETHELESS, IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENT ON MOVEMENT AND ACCESS WOULD HELP. THE HOURS OF THE KARNI CROSSING WOULD SOON BE EXTENDED UNTIL 11 PM AND WOULD REACH A CAPACITY OF 750 TRUCKS A DAY. OLMERT PRAISED USSC GENERAL DAYTON'S WORK, SAYING THAT ISRAEL HAD SUPPORTED THE CONGRESSIONAL RELEASE OF NEARLY \$60 MILLION FOR DAYTON'S SECURITY PLAN. IMPROVED MOVEMENT AND ACCESS SHOULD REDOUND TO ABBAS'S CREDIT ON THE

PALESTINIAN STREET. OLMERT ADDED THAT HE HAD TRANSFERRED \$100 MILLION OF PALESTINIAN TAX REVENUES TO ABBAS AND COULD GIVE MORE MONEY. ASKED HOW TO PAY PALESTINIAN SECURITY FORCES, OLMERT SAID SOME MONEY COULD GO TO THE PRESIDENTIAL GUARD, BUT NOT THE PA SECURITY FORCES SINCE "HANIYYA IS STILL A TERRORIST." ACKERMAN SAID HE DID NOT DISAGREE BUT STRESSED THE NEED TO IMPACT THE PALESTINIAN STREET. ACKERMAN DID NOT ENGAGE ON OLMERT'S REQUEST THAT HE CANCEL A MEETING WITH NUG FOREIGN MINISTER ABU AMAR SCHEDULED FOR THE NEXT DAY, SAYING MERELY THAT HE HEARD THE ADVICE. OLMERT STRESSED THAT HE THOUGHT THE MEETING WOULD BE A MISTAKE SINCE IT WOULD CONVEY FORMAL RECOGNITION OF THE NUG.

IRANIAN THREAT AND IRAQ WITHDRAWAL

17. (C) ACKERMAN STATED THAT HE SAW U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN IRAQ AS WEAKENING THE U.S. ABILITY TO DEAL WITH IRAN. OLMERT SAID HE DID NOT WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE U.S. DOMESTIC CONTROVERSY OVER IRAQ, THOUGH HE INSISTED THAT THE FALL OF SADDAM HAD BEEN BENEFICIAL FOR ISRAEL. THE U.S. DECISION TO INVADE IRAQ WAS NOW HISTORY, THE QUESTION WAS HOW TO WITHDRAW. OLMERT CALLED IRAN A SERIOUS THREAT, AND COMPLAINED THAT "NOT A SINGLE COUNTRY" WAS BLOCKING INVESTMENT IN IRAN OR PROHIBITING TRAVEL BY IRANIAN OFFICIALS, THOUGH ACKERMAN AND THE AMBASSADOR NOTED U.S. LEGAL PROHIBITIONS. OLMERT SAID HIS CONCERN WAS HOW THE U.S. COULD BE IN THE BEST POSITION TO CONFRONT IRAN, ALTHOUGH NOT NECESSARILY MILITARILY. HE ADDED THAT HE WANTED THE WORLD TO IMPOSE SUCH TOUGH SANCTIONS THAT IRAN WOULD BE FORCED TO GIVE UP ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM.

18. (C) OLMERT CAUTIONED THAT A PREMATURE U.S. PULL-OUT FROM IRAQ WOULD STRENGTHEN IRAN AND ISLAMIC RADICALS, WHO WOULD GAIN GREAT POWER IF THE U.S. LEFT. IT WOULD ALSO AFFECT THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA, AND JORDAN. OLMERT SAID IRAQ WAS NOT HIS ISSUE, BUT HE WAS INTERESTED IN THE U.S. BEING READY TO RALLY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AGAINST IRAN. ACKERMAN RESPONDED THAT IN HIS VIEW, THE U.S. HAD LOST THE ABILITY TO LEAD THE WORLD ON IRAN DUE TO OUR INVOLVEMENT IN IRAQ. IT WAS MORE DIFFICULT TO GET THE WORLD

TO CONDEMN IRAN DUE TO THE WEAKENED U.S. POSITION.

¶9. (C) OLMERT ASSURED ACKERMAN THAT HE WAS "NOT INTERESTED IN AN ISRAELI MILITARY CONFRONTATION WITH IRAN" AND WAS NOT ENCOURAGING THE U.S. TO DO SO EITHER. SECURITY COUNCIL SANCTIONS WERE VERY IMPORTANT, AS WERE FINANCIAL PRESSURES. THE U.S. SHOULD RALLY THE MODERATE ARABS AGAINST IRAN, ADDING THAT THIS WAS NOT LINKED TO THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION. THE ARABS WANTED TO KNOW IF THE U.S. WAS STILL PREPARED TO BE STRONG AGAINST THE RADICALS.

ETHIOPIAN JEWS AND PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

¶10. (C) AS THE MEETING CONCLUDED, ACKERMAN SAID HE WANTED TO RAISE TWO QUICK QUESTIONS. ON ETHIOPIAN JEWS, ACKERMAN NOTED HIS LONGTIME INTEREST IN THEIR IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL AND SAID THE AGREEMENT WAS STUCK IN THE MUD. ON PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS, ACKERMAN TERMED THEM AN "ENDANGERED SPECIES." HE SAID THEY WERE QUIET BUT VERY DISAPPOINTED IN THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP. HE NOTED THEIR DESIRE TO CONTROL THEIR HOLY SITES, AND POSSIBLY EVEN ESTABLISH AN AUTONOMOUS ZONE IN BETHLEHEM. HE SUGGESTED THAT ISRAEL FIND WAYS TO SUPPORT THIS COMMUNITY OF 40,000. OLMERT RESPONDED THAT HE WOULD SEE WHAT HE COULD DO ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS, BUT WAS SKEPTICAL THEY WOULD WELCOME ISRAELI HELP. REGARDING THE ETHIOPIANS, HE STATED THERE WAS NO PROBLEM WITH JEWS BUT THERE WERE QUESTIONS INVOLVING THE JEWISHNESS OF THE FALASH MURA. NEVERTHELESS, THEY WERE STILL ARRIVING AT A RATE OF 300 A MONTH.

¶11. (U) CODEL ACKERMAN DID NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR THIS MESSAGE.

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HTTP://WWW.STATE.SGOV.GOV/P/NEA/TELAVIV

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JONES